

Introduction – Concepts of animal protection and welfare including obligations and rights

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A brief history of attitudes to animals

The idea that animals used by people should not be treated like inanimate possessions but should be protected from actions that might cause suffering is very old and widespread in human society. Irrespective of any law, many people have condemned those perceived as being cruel to animals. On the other hand, cruelty was part of some forms of human entertainment. In Europe, laws intended to prevent cruelty to dogs and horses were passed as long as 200 years ago and were gradually extended to other kinds of animals. Most early laws referred to companion animals and working animals but not to farm animals. Some laws protected animals against the forms of animal experimentation which were considered likely to cause them substantial pain. Laws were also passed which proscribed some forms of entertainment involving animals as being cruel but others were still permitted. Laws aimed at preventing poor welfare in animals have become more wide-ranging, both in terms of species and the different animal uses, and have been passed in more and more countries.

The treatment of animals is an area in which codes of conduct and descriptions of good practice exist. Even amongst groups of people whose objective was to kill animals, there have long existed unwritten codes of conduct concerning what actions were or were not permissible. For example, as discussed by Serpell (1996, 1989), people using guns and dogs to hunt mammals or birds would expend energy and resources trying to ensure that firstly, animals were shot in a way likely to kill quickly and secondly, that shot animals were found and killed rather than being left to die slowly. More recently, codes of practice relating to animals kept for food production and other

purposes have been produced by various organisations (see below).

The way in which animals are treated is much affected by the way in which the human user or carer thinks about those animals. If the animal is thought of as an object to be used which is little different from something inanimate, actions which cause poor welfare in the animals are much more likely than if the animals are considered to be similar in many ways to humans. Hence knowledge of animal functioning tends to engender respect where the animal is sentient, that is to say that it has significant capacity for awareness of itself and its relationships with its environment (see below). In recent years, knowledge of animal functioning, particularly their behaviour and physiology, has increased rapidly and has been the subject of much media attention.

This is a major reason why public concern about animal welfare has increased in many countries during the last thirty years and especially in the last ten years. Evidence of this is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 – Evidence of increased concern about animal welfare

1. Letters from the public, media coverage.
2. References in parliamentary discussions and government statements.
3. Requests for scientific evidence concerning animal welfare.
4. Activity of scientific and other advisory committees.
5. Funding of scientific research on animal welfare.
6. Increased teaching and conferences.
7. More legislation.

(from Broom, 1999)

Members of the public exert influence by letters to government, other public bodies and commercial organisations and

by statements which appear in the media. Members of the European Parliament report that they receive more letters about animal welfare than on any other topic. Politicians respond by raising the issues, including them in manifestos, seeking scientific information, encouraging further research and teaching, and by passing laws.

People who own or work on farms, or other commercial organisations using animals, are influenced by a variety of factors when they are deciding on animal housing and management policies and when they are executing these policies. They will be endeavouring to make a profit so the monetary costs which they incur and the potential financial returns which they are likely to get for their product will be factors of major importance to them. A cost to those involved in animal industry, which may not be fully appreciated by many of them, results from consumers who do not like some aspect of production and refuse to buy the product (Broom, 1994).

The attitudes of animal users depend upon early training, traditional practices, acquisition of knowledge from others subsequent to any training, personal experience and general beliefs and philosophy. Training did not, until recently, include much information about animal welfare except where it impinged on profitability. Even diseases were often mentioned in agriculture training only in relation to effects on growth, offspring production or product quantity and quality. Today's training courses are more likely to include information about the welfare of the animals (Broom, 2005) and most agricultural trade journals nowadays cover animal welfare issues. Traditional practices are often deemed by farmers or others keeping or using animals, to be right for the sole reason that "this is the way that we have always done it". Although some of these methods are the best ones to produce good welfare, others are not and traditional methods and practices should not persist just because they are traditions.

Farmers and other animal users have to live with their families, friends and neighbours. If these people are critical of the effects on the welfare of animals of the methods used, the farmer may change these methods. In some cases, the animals

are very obvious to all who pass by the farm. If a sheep or cattle farmer has many animals which are noticeably lame, it is likely that someone will comment on this to the farmer. Similarly, horse establishments or zoos whose animals are lame may be criticised. People in charge of animals do not like to be thought of as incompetent or uncaring, so they may respond to such comments by giving the animals veterinary treatment or changing the management system so as to avoid lameness. If the animals are inside a building or otherwise hidden from public view, the number of people who might comment on poor welfare will be smaller and there is a greater chance that the farmer or other person responsible can persuade him or herself that there are no significant welfare problems.

Meetings with others in the same business and trade magazines will tend to help animal users to arrive at common views about their various problems. A farmer, laboratory animal technician, or zookeeper who has to reconcile him or herself to poor welfare in some animals will find it easier to do so with the support of others. Such influences can slow down change towards better welfare for the animals, especially if economic factors mitigate against such change.

The views of the general public are largely made known to farmers and others involved in animal usage via the media. There is frequent coverage of animal welfare issues in newspapers, on radio and television and this, by bringing scientific knowledge about animal complexity to the attention of people, affects their attitudes. Farmers and some other animal users may see themselves portrayed as uncaring. Some such portrayals are unfair but others are correct and the farmer cannot hide from them by putting animals in buildings and associating only with other farmers. When public demonstrations about animal welfare issues occur, the people who use the animals need to take note of them. The demonstrations by great numbers of largely orderly and apparently normal people against the shipping of calves under conditions which were illegal within the United Kingdom had a big influence on farmers and politicians alike. It is not the most vociferous people, some of whom may be rather extreme in their views, who have the greatest influence on animal users or politicians but the mod-

erate people who represent a groundswell of public opinion. In many recent surveys in Europe, animal welfare has been shown to be an important issue for the general public. For example, about three quarters of people questioned in France regarded animal welfare as a problem affecting their decision to purchase veal or eggs (Ouedraogo, 1998) and of 420 school-girls questioned in Dublin, 34% stated that they avoided eating meat, principally for animal welfare (53%) rather than nutrition (29%) reasons (Ryan, 1997).

Welfare and related concepts

Animal protection is a human action but animal welfare is a varying quality of any living animal. The scientific study of animal welfare has developed rapidly during the last fifteen years. The concepts have been refined and a range of methods of assessment have been developed. Substantial challenges to animal functioning include those resulting from: pathogens, tissue damage, attack or threat of attack by a conspecific or predator, other social competition, complexity of information processing in a situation where an individual receives excessive stimulation, lack of key stimuli such as a teat for a young mammal or social contact cues, lack of overall stimulation, and inability to control interactions with the environment. Hence potentially damaging challenges may come from the environment outside the body, for example, many pathogens or causes of tissue damage, or from within it, for example, anxiety, boredom or frustration which come from the environment of a control system. Systems that respond to or prepare for challenges are coping systems and coping means having control of mental and bodily stability (Broom and Johnson, 1993). Coping attempts may be unsuccessful, in that such control is not achieved, but as soon as there is control, the individual is coping. Systems for attempting to cope with challenge may respond to short-term or long-term problems, or sometimes to both. The responses to challenge may involve activity in parts of the brain and various endocrine, immunological or other physiological responses as well as behaviour. However, the more that we learn about these responses, the clearer it becomes that these various types of response are